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PAGE 1/5

NEW YORK TIMES
20 January 1985

Beirut to Try to Help Kidnapped Americans

Special to The New York Times

BEIRUT, Lebanon, Jan. 19 — Prime Minister Rashid Karami said today that his Government would try to obtain the release of five Americans kidnapped in Moslem West Beirut in the last year.

He made the announcement after meeting with the United States Ambassador, Reginald Bartholomew. "We shall undertake the necessary contacts because it is not proper that the freedom of these Americans be restricted in this fashion," he told reporters after the meeting.

Mr. Karami, who is also Foreign Minister, said his talks with Mr. Bar-

tholomew concentrated on recent statements indicating that the kidnappers planned a mock trial of the Americans.

He was speaking of a statement to this effect this week by an anonymous caller who claimed to speak for the Islamic Holy War group. In calls to foreign news agencies here, the man accused the five Americans of spying and working for the Central Intelligence Agency.

The Islamic group, which is believed to be made up of Shiite fundamentalists linked to Iran, took responsibility for abducting the Americans. The same group said it was responsible for the

suicide bomb attacks against the United States Embassy and the headquarters of the American Marines.

The five missing Americans are William Buckley, a political officer at the United States Embassy; Jeremy Levine, the chief of the Cable News Network bureau; the Rev. Benjamin Wier, a Presbyterian minister; Peter Kilburn, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, and the Rev. Lawrence Martin Jenco, a Roman Catholic priest working for Catholic Relief Services.

Mr. Karami said the statement that the Americans would be put on trial had caused deep anxiety because a

trial would harm Lebanese-American relations and tarnish Lebanon's image abroad.

The Prime Minister did not say with whom the proposed contacts would be made to seek the release of the hostages, nor did he give any hint of whether the Lebanese authorities knew where they were being held.

United States officials have said on several occasions recently that they had information confirming that the kidnapped Americans were still alive. Foreign and local news reports said the hostages were believed to be in the area of Baalbek in eastern Lebanon, where militant Shiite activists are known to have bases.